

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

BULLETIN FORTY-FIVE

FALL, 1953

IN TRIBUTE TO MISS SARAH R. BARTLETT....

This issue of the THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN is dedicated to Miss Sarah R. Bartlett, who for thirty-three years was librarian of the Concord Free Public Library and who retired from her duties there on July 1, 1953. Miss Bartlett has been a constant, consistent, and ever-willing aid to all students of Concord authors and Concord history. Hardly a book on these subjects has been published in the past quarter-century without a prefatory note thanking Miss Bartlett for her aid. And we of the Thoreau Society are particularly grateful to her for the interest she has taken in our society, for the annual exhibitions she has prepared in conjunction with our meetings, and for the care she has taken of our Thoreau Society Archives. We all join in wishing her many years of happy retirement.

ON READING THOREAU by John Davies . . .

(Mr. Davies, of Caterham, Surrey, England, was a life-long friend of the late Henry Salt, the British biographer of Thoreau, and is an honorary member of the Thoreau Society.)

I remember that when I first met Henry Salt in the early twenties, he expressed the view that Thoreau's writings would prove to be of greater importance than Emerson's and I think it was a quality of practical realism in Thoreau's writing that he had in mind. This question,--What is that essence of Thoreau's writing that makes him different from his fellows? --is difficult to answer, as I well know, remembering my own schoolday efforts to justify in discussion my enthusiasm for my new literary find, Thoreau. Then, I worshipped him--Only this side idolatry --were these Ben Jonson's words?--and to this day I am unable to read Thoreau for long at a sitting without being overcome by a kind of mental intoxication, as if the wine were too heavy for a weak head and generally require a couple of hours' walk to sober me again. Certainly, on first reading Thoreau, I felt like Keats --"Watcher of the skies, when a new planet swims into his ken."

The rarity of Thoreau's thought, the surpassing poetic beauty of his literary expression and his dry Olympian humour are qualities that may be taken as not questioned; it is to be doubted whether Lowell, Stevenson or any other literary detractor of Thoreau would have risked

writing comparison with his own writings in these respects.

That he was unusually sane and quite objective may also be taken as admitted, his completely practical sensible approach to everyday necessities of life being apparent.

He accepted responsibility for every act and practice of his life; he deferred

to no authority spiritual or temporal, "No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof." He did not associate himself with any religious, political or other institution, and it is clearly his view that human life as it unfolded would tolerate government only as a servant. For instance, his relationship with the government of Massachusetts might have been expressed by the words --"Look you to sanitation, street-lighting, transport; I, the individual, shall do my own thinking."

Thoreau was too sane to hold any beliefs or ideals. One believes only that which one does not know, so, to be guided by beliefs, is to follow what one does not know, but chooses out of one's ignorance. The idealist is one who lives for the future, not the present - the only real - he isn't there, but hopes to get there. Thoreau was all there always. --"Idle time runs gadding by and leaves me with Eternity alone." He lived actually not ideally, he started from where he was, in short, he was sane.

We are told that Thoreau was not a great naturalist, poet, mystic, philosopher or what not, but I am not aware that he attempted or claimed to be any of these.

If he had become only a first rate naturalist, this would have been of little avail to us poor Hottentots and Red Indians. It seems to me that he was a naturalist because of his having been a keen observer, not vice versa. He seems to have been keenly aware of all that went on around and in him, and the voluminous journals were no doubt a record of this awareness. The ancient injunction --"Man know thyself" might have been his own text, so closely did his approach to life fit in with it.

He did set out to be a competent writer, and there is no doubt that here he succeeded to the full; indeed it would be difficult to name his equal for confident, vigorous verbal expression, a never-failing delight to the reader.

Most of all, he claimed to be a student of life, to have attempted to extract its marrow, to have fronted its essential facts, to have known it by experience and to have given a true account of it in his writings. Here we are all at home with him, all vitally interested; for each of us is confronted with this sphinx riddle of life, and glad to accompany his thought in the attempt to solve it.

Here we come to the feature that is the particular fascination of Thoreau's writing. His most significant unique attrac-

tion lies I think, not so much in his power of literary expression, his extraordinary sanity or his masterful dealing with the important study of the human way of life, as in his intimations of a state of consciousness beyond the capacity of his verbal expression to convey. We may be able to accompany him in thought to where we can share his experiences, but he cannot communicate them. He writes -- "You will pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from its very nature." Thoreau was always in earnest, never wrote for effect, always fully meant what he wrote. We must accept that he was completely factual and that his experience was real when he uttered such statements (many more of which could be quoted) as -- "To be calm, to be serene!....I awoke into a music which none about me heard." -- "Silence alone is worthy to be heard....I hear the unspeakable."

The indication, I take it, is that in that silence or stillness he speaks of, we come to the end of verbal expression, to the end of thought perhaps, to a state of experiencing without identity.

What does he mean by -- "Hold fast to your most indefinite waking dream"? I think he says somewhere that he values that waking dream more than any other experience of life.

What was the -- "Private business" to transact which with the fewer obstacles, he went to the hut at Walden Pond? He would have told us if he could, he was not the man to withhold such information, but the nature of the business - clearly no hardship, but a joy and satisfaction - was incomunicable, though presumably open to anyone to experience for themselves, perhaps, however, at the expense of shedding a good deal of mental and material inessentials.

It seems clear that Thoreau was more alive than his fellows, the bounds of his consciousness were set wider. He gives a true account of his life but can only hint at those experiences in the wider consciousness.

What we have in common with him is life of which he was an uncommonly acute observer. If we have any real experience or make any discovery in this sphere, we may find it confirmed in his writings. I suggest that his retirement to Walden Pond, was in response to an urge for self-discovery which required aloofness, aloneness - it is interesting that except for one occasion which he faithfully records, he was never lonely - this necessary aloneness was called austerity by his friends. This may sound mystical, mysterious, and it may be asked -- "Where does this lead us"? but then - where are we? This remoteness of Thoreau might give rise to a cult, to imitation; some might want to retire to the solitude of the woods in the hope of sharing his experience but any such action would be futile and deplorable

We shall go on counting the cats in Zanzibar, and playing Kittlybenders, but when eventually there emerges from his chrysalis the complete man I have no doubt that his difference from us will be in the direction indicated by the life and writings of Thoreau.

THOREAU IN CONCORD

(In response to Prof Adams' article in our last bulletin, we have received the following communication from Mr. Wilfred Wheeler of Falmouth, Mass.)

When I was a small boy I used to visit at the Hubbard House where Miss Susie, Fannie and Lizzie lived and whenever the subject of Thoreau came up, there was always a denunciation of him for getting the woods on fire, not so much it seemed as the destruction of the woods but rather for the discomfort the girls had in handling the blackened wood, which of course made their hands black and they laid it all on to Thoreau. My Aunts Sarah and Mary also had the same trouble, not to say that the men had to handle the partly burned wood with the same damage to hands and clothing. They were particularly bitter about it in as much as Thoreau after setting the fire went up on Fairhaven Hill and watched it burn. You can imagine how the old people must have cussed him out for not helping to put the fire out.

My father used to say, it was too bad that Thoreau was so retiring for he used to walk by the place with his head down and not speak to anyone. He always regretted not knowing Thoreau.

GANDHI AND THOREAU by Henry S.L. Polak

(Mr. George Hendrick has called our attention to this brief article in the NEW YORK EVENING POST for May 11, 1931.)

I have just seen the editorial note entitled "Gandhi and Thoreau" in your issue of April 2. May I, as the then editor of INDIAN OPINION, Mahatma Gandhi's newspaper in South Africa and his then closest colleague, make one or two corrections that seem to be needed to put the matter in its proper light?

Mr. Gandhi was not in 1907 "an obscure Hindu law student" nor was he in London. He was already for fourteen years a barrister-at-law practicing as a solicitor or attorney in South Africa. At the time in question he had already begun to organize his passive resistance movement in the Transvaal against certain anti-Indian laws that had already been passed by the Transvaal legislature.

I cannot recall whether, early in 1907, he or I first came across the volume of Thoreau's Essays (published, I believe, in Scott's Library) but we were both of us enormously impressed by the confirmation of the rightness of the principles of passive resistance and civil disobedi-

ience that had already been started against the objectionable laws, contained in the essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience."

After consultation with Mr. Gandhi I reproduced the essay in the columns of INDIAN OPINION and it was translated into the Gujarati language, in which, as well as in English, the paper was published, and the essay was subsequently circulated in pamphlet form later in the same year. INDIAN OPINION organized an essay competition on "The Ethic of Passive Resistance," with special reference to Thoreau's essay and Socrates' writings, that had already come to Mr. Gandhi's notice.

EINSTEIN ON GANDHI AND THOREAU...WRH

(When Albert Einstein recently published a letter in the NEW YORK TIMES stating that if he were called before a congressional investigating committee, he would adopt Gandhi's techniques of civil disobedience, we wrote him asking his opinion of Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. We print his reply herewith, thinking it might be of interest in conjunction with Mr. Polak's article above.)

August 19, 1953

Dear Professor Harding:

Thank you for your letter. I have never read anything by Thoreau nor am I acquainted with his life history. There are, and have been, many--but not enough--people of independent moral judgment feeling it their duty to resist evil even if sanctioned by state laws.

It may well be that Thoreau has in some way influenced Gandhi's thought. But it should not be forgotten that Gandhi's

development was something resulting from extraordinary intellectual and moral forces in connection with political ingenuity and an unique situation. I think that Gandhi would have been Gandhi even without Thoreau and Tolstoy.

Sincerely yours,
A. Einstein.

A life membership in the Thoreau Society costs twenty-five dollars, which approximately pays the cost of printing one issue of our bulletin. Thus the life-membership of Miss Charlotte Thatcher of Bangor, Maine has defrayed the printing expenses of this issue.

THOREAU JOTTINGS

For several issues now the feature articles in our bulletin have been of such length as to force the cutting out of many miscellaneous notes that have come to hand. With this issue we shall try to catch up.

Thoreau seems to be receiving an increasing amount of attention on the radio these days: on August 23, 1953, WALDEN was discussed on Columbia's "Invitation to Learning" broadcast. On March 29, Tyrone Power

read from Thoreau on WNYC. On May 6, Samuel Middlebrook of CCNY discussed Thoreau on WNYC. And on Jan. 31, 1953, Chester Jorgenson discussed Thoreau on WJBK-TV in Detroit. Mention should also be made of the excellent series of broadcasts on the whole Transcendentalist movement over the Boston University station in the spring. We understand this last series is to be rebroadcast on other university stations this winter.

The New York Public Library is sponsoring a WALDEN lecture in its discussion group series this winter. . . . Mrs. H. W. Schroeder gave a lecture on Thoreau for the Bergenfield (N.J.) Woman's Club in the spring and caused a run on Thoreau's works in the local library. . . . On Nov. 21, 1952, T.L. Bailey lectured on Thoreau before the famed Rowfant Club in Cleveland, Ohio.

Mr. Herbert Hosmer and Miss Olive Hosmer have recently presented all of the negatives and many of the prints of photographs of Thoreau interest taken by Fred Hosmer; Miss Hosmer has also presented Thoreau's original survey of Bedford St., Concord, all to Concord Free Public Library.

Recent acquisitions of the Thoreau Society Archives: An unpublished paper by E.J. Unger on "What Was the Measure of Emerson's Influence upon Thoreau?", presented by Clayton Hoagland; the galley-proofs of Walter Harding's CHECK-LIST OF THE EDITIONS OF WALDEN, presented by the author.

F.H. Allen has pointed out to us that as well as the manuscripts listed in our Spring bulletin, Harvard University also has one of his commonplace books in its Widener Memorial Room.

H.S. Canby is doing a much-needed rewriting of the Thoreau article for ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA.

Mr. Arthur Phillips, Box 154, Hopkinton, Mass., is the owner of a table said to have been used by the Thoreau family and is interested in selling it.

Seven Gables Bookshop of New York City recently advertized a first edition of WALDEN that has inscribed in it, "Walden Pond--24 May, 1858 1.50 PM--I gratefully acknowledge the Divine Mercy that has permitted me to see for myself this pure gem of the lonely woods. Written, with my heels in the water, (to make sure of my position) at Thoreau's dipping place; a fresh SW wind blowing and the mimic waves sometimes wetting my pants--Wm Pedder."

Will wonders never cease? The June 23, 1953 NEW YORK TIMES reports that the State Department had approved of the use of the Viking Portable edition of Thoreau in overseas information libraries. We guess they overlooked "Civil Disobedience" in its table of contents.

Paul Henry, in his IRISH PORTRAIT (London: Batsford, 1951, p. 85) attributes his personal interest in the wilder parts of Ireland to his reading of WALDEN many years ago.

When Emory University conducted a Religious Emphasis Week last November, they issued play money which included the following quotation: "Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul.--Thoreau."

W.B.Conant of Concord, Mass., would like to know the source of this quotation from Thoreau: "Truth never turns to rebuke falsehood; her own straightforwardness is the severest correction."

W. Stephen Thomas, Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, Rochester, N.Y., is interested in forming a local Thoreau group and would be glad to hear from any members in that vicinity.

Louise Hall Tharp's new biography of Horace Mann, UNTIL VICTORY (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953, p. 336) suggests that Horace Mann, Jr., may have acquired his fatal tuberculosis from Thoreau on their trip to Minnesota together.

Los Angeles Public Library has a branch library named "Henry David Thoreau" at 3976 S. Hobart Blvd.

We frequently receive inquiries about the postoffice of Thoreau, New Mexico. We are told that it was named by the Santa Fe Railroad, "No doubt in honor of the naturalist," and that it is pronounced "thru"!

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY..WH

Adams, Raymond. "Thoreau and His Neighbors." CONCORD (Mass.) JOURNAL. Aug. 13, 1953. p. 1. "Reprinted from THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN 44.

Bagg, Edith A. "Fear of Fear." NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE. July 26, 1953. p.4. On T. and others as a source for FDR's famous speech.

Bass, Althea. "Hawk Flight at Walden." SAT. REV. OF LIT. July 25, 1953. p.31 A sonnet.

Blau, Joseph L. "Henry David Thoreau: Anarchist." in MEN AND MOVEMENTS IN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY. (NY: Prentice-Hall, 1952), pp. 131-141.

Caldwell, Joshua William. "Thoreau, The Nature-Lover." in JOSHUA WILLIAM CALDWELL: A MEMORIAL VOLUME. (Nashville, Tenn.: Irving Club, 1909), pp.205-222.

Cameron, Kenneth Walter. "Thoreau Discovers Emerson." BULLETIN OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, LVII (July, 1953), 319-334. Another of Prof. Cameron's extremely important source studies, this dealing with T. and the "Institute," a Harvard undergraduate club, giving records of its meetings and listing the books which T. withdrew from its library.

CONCORD JOURNAL. "The Thoreau Society to Meet July 11." July 9, 1953. p. 1.

Grenville, R.H. "Henry Thoreau." NEW YORK TIMES. Sept. 10, 1953. A poem.

Harding, Walter. "A Centennial Checklist of the Editions of Henry David Thoreau's WALDEN." BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOC. OF UNIV. OF VA. SECRETARY'S NEWS SHEET #28 (Sept., 1953), Supplement. To be published in book form in Jan. 1954.

Howe, R.D. "Society Meets in Concord." (Harrisburg, Pa.) HOME STAR. July 22, 1953. p. 1. Thoreau Society Annual Meeting.

Lyons, W.A. "A Walden Reflective." BOSTON HERALD. May 16, 1953. A poem.

Mayer, Frederick. "Thoreau and Utopia" in A HISTORY OF AMERICAN THOUGHT (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown, 1951), pp. 158-169

North, Sterling. "Of Walden Revisited" N Y WORLD TELEGRAM. Aug. 11, 1953.

p. 18. An evaluation of WALDEN.
Ostrander, G.M. "Emerson and Thoreau and John Brown." MISS. VALLEY HIST. REV., XXXIX (March, 1953), 713-726.
Reel, Lois. "He Didn't Give a Hoot." CLEVELAND (Ohio) PLAIN DEALER. Aug. 4, 1953. A poem parodying Whittier:

Henry Thoreau, a remarkable man,
Lived in the woods as not everyone can.
"Hoot if you must this old gray shed,
But I'm better off than you," he said.

Rich, Adrienne Cecile. "Concord River" NEW YORKER. Sept. 12, 1953. A poem.

Rich, Everett. "No Solitude at Walden Pond Where Thoreau Found Peace." WATERTOWN (NY) DAILY TIMES. July 2, 1953. Account of a visit to Concord reprinted from KANSAS CITY STAR.

Ring, Elizabeth. "Fannie Hardy Eckstorm: Maine Woods Historian." NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY, XXVI (March, 1953), 45-64. On T's Maine Woods' biographer.

Russell, Francis. "Thoreau's River Journey." CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR. July 1, 1953. An essay on A WEEK.

Sanborn, Victor Channing. "Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, A.B." KANS. HIST. COL. XIV, 58-63. On T's friend and biographer.

Waldinger, Ernst. "An Thoreau" DIE KUHLEN BAUERNSTUBEN. Vienna. pp. 67-68. A poem.

Walker, Paul. "Fate of Famed Cabin Is Told." HARRISBURG (Pa.) HOME STAR. July 8, 1953. p. 1. On the later history of the Walden cabin.

White, William Chapman. "Get Moving, Thoreau!" N Y HERALD TRIBUNE. July 21, 1953. p. 22. If T. should return to life today. An essay.

Zumaran, Adriana. "Desobediencia Civil" RECONSTRUIR (Buenos Aires). Jan. 4, 1952. On T's "Civil Disobedience."

We are indebted to the following for information contributed to this and other recent bulletins: R.Adams, H. Adel, F. Allen, H. Arnold, T.Bailey, W.Berry, D. Boyington, J.Broderkck, E.Buttrick, R. Chapman, L.Chirin, W.Conant, W.Cummings, S.Gottsch, R.Graham, G.Haglund, C. Hoagland, I.Hoover, G.Hosmer, W.Houston, N.Lehrman, A.Lowmes, J.Makara, E.Oliver, F.Oliver, R.Ritchell, H.Schroeder, A. Shedd, A.Wesley, H.West, R.Wheeler, W. White, K.Whitford, E.Wilson, and J.Wylie. Please notify the secretary of new items and items missed.

The Thoreau Society, Inc., is an informal organization of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year; life membership, twenty-five dollars. A price list of back publications may be obtained from the secretary. All material, unless otherwise signed, is compiled by the secretary. Officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and secretary treasurer:

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